TO: Acting Secretary of Education, Carolyn Dumaresq and Christina Baumer, Division Chief

Division of Professional Education and Teacher Quality

Pennsylvania Department of Education ­ School Leadership and Teacher Quality

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Cc Dr. Barbara Minzenberg

Deputy Secretary, Office of Child Development & Early Learning

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FROM: PA Association of Early Childhood Teacher Educators (PA AECTE)

Affiliate of the National Association of Early Childhood Teacher Educators (<http://naecte.org/>)

Responses can be sent to: Lynn Hartle at [LHARTLE@HOTMAIL.COM](mailto:LHARTLE@HOTMAIL.COM)

RE: Division of Professional Education and Teacher Quality,

\*Email Update, June 2, 2014 “Certification by Adding On”, p.3

<http://www.portal.state.pa.us/portal/server.pt/community/chapter_49/8627/announcements/523438>

DATE: June 17, 2014

PA AECTE POSITION TO PA “CERTIFICATION BY ADDING ON”

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Pennsylvania Association of Early Childhood Teacher Educators (PA AECTE) stands in firm opposition to the new certification policies (Update June 2, 2014) that allow teachers with one PA certification to add another without further content study and age-group related field experiences. There are vast differences in the developmental stages and learning needs of younger and older children and there is no research that supports how or why teachers with expertise in one certification area would acquire expertise in the other on the basis of a stand-alone test. This letter explains that this opposition is clearly grounded in 1) the stated intention of the state of Pennsylvania to prepare highly qualified educators and 2) current research related to high quality early childhood education.

The following concerns are addressed in the letter regarding the limits of the teacher exam-only certification as a pathway of preparing highly qualified teachers in PA:

* The exam will not measure the teacher candidates’ practical experience to implement specialized subject matter that they gain in teacher preparation field experiences.
* In early childhood classrooms with exam-only certified teachers, without true understanding of the early years, the curriculum may be “pushed down” to young children and result in “didactic teaching, bored and listless kids, and an aimless curriculum”
* The teacher exam can’t measure candidates’ adjustment of teaching for the social, emotional, cognitive developmental levels of young children or adolescents in that respective age group.
* Exam-only certified teachers’ knowledge and skills to utilize contemporary research on brain development may be limited, especially with regards to self-regulation, a necessary school-related executive function of the brain that children need to develop early to be successful.
* There are no PDE family-collaboration competencies for the 4th-8th teachers’ preparation and if exam-only certified, would have no preparation in unique ways to collaborate with families of young children.

We request that this decision be rescinded immediately in the best interest of the children of the state of Pennsylvania and to ensure future quality and success of this state’s public schools. Please read this entire letter to learn more about the ways in which current research and policy supports our position.

POSITION RESEARCH AND POLICY SUPPORT

The Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE), following the lead of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) (Darling-Hammond & Sykes, 2003) as well as teacher education programs, school administrators, teachers, and families have agreed upon the importance of maintaining high standards for content and pedagogy in the preparation of highly qualified teachers in Pennsylvania (PA). In doing so, these institutions and individuals have developed rigorous teacher preparation competencies relevant to each certificate and aligned with the Common Core Standards (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, 2010) for each respective developmental level. Pennsylvania's work to address gaps in early childhood teacher preparation for PreK-4th teachers was commended in the report *Getting In Sync: Revamping Licensing and Preparation for Teachers in Pre-K, Kindergarten, and the Early Grades* “as a way to improve the effectiveness of teachers by aligning teachers’ preparation with the developmental stage of the students they will teach.” (Bornfreund, 2011 p. 15).

Years of negotiation resulted in new teacher certifications (PreK-4th and 4th-8th), “. . . created to provide teachers with more depth of knowledge and skills for the important developmental years of PreK through third grade and the middle level years of fourth through eighth grade.” p.3\*. Teacher candidates engage in teacher-mentor supported specific field experiences which according to PDE should be “early, often, and structured” to learn the unique strategies to implement content and pedagogy for the respective age group.

The June 2, 2014 email update from the PDE, “Certification by Adding On”, p.3 states that “teachers with valid instructional certificates [will be permitted] to add the PreK-4 and the 4-8 certificates by passing the required certification assessment (effective June 1, 2014)”\*, BUT this runs counter to these PA “highly qualified” teacher preparation initiatives and counter to research in teacher preparation. Taking and passing a teacher certification exam, does not ensure teachers will have the knowledge, skills, and dispositions to teach an age group in which they did not receive teacher preparation.

The teacher certification exam will not measure the teacher candidates’ practical experience and know-how to implement specialized subject matter. What experience and knowledge will 4th-8th teachers have to teach reading and vocabulary development in the early grades, a critical building block for school success (Neuman & Wright, 2014)? Will PreK-4th teachers who studied young children’s literature be prepared to teach eighth graders who are learning to read and analyze adolescent literature? The same care and attention must be given to mathematical instructional progression and to building deeper understandings of mathematical topics from PreK-8th grade (Schielack, 2006).

The American Association of Colleges of Teacher Education (AACTE) recommends that colleges of education include professional preparation and certification for Early Childhood Education (ECE) teachers that is specific to the ECE field and is not just an adaptation of preparation elementary teacher certifications (AACTE, 2004). The American Federation of Teachers devoted the entire Summer 2014 issue of their journal to “A strong start for all learners.”, p.1 (Weingarten, 2014). “Early childhood is a distinct period of life that has value in itself as well as creating foundations for later years”, p.3. Teaching without a comprehensive understanding of the needs of young children old has led to misuses of curriculum, assessment, and program evaluation (NAEYC & NAECS/SDE, 2002). Without true understanding of the early years, the curriculum may be “pushed down” to young children and result in “didactic teaching, bored and listless kids, and an aimless curriculum” (Black, 2003; McDaniel, Isaac, Brooks, & Hatch, 2005). High quality early childhood curriculum with specialized early childhood teachers were reported in several longitudinal studies as factors for long-term child success, especially for children in high risk and low income areas (Carolina Abecedarian Project, 1999; Peisner-Feinberg, E.S., Burchinal, M.R., Clifford, R.M., Culkin, Howes, Kagan, Yazejian, Byler, Rustici, & Zelazo, 1999; Bowman., Donovan, & Burns, 2001; Reynolds, Temple, Robertson, Mann, 2001).

The teacher exam can’t measure candidates’ ability to adjust their teaching to the social, emotional, cognitive developmental level of children or adolescents in that age group. According to the competencies set forth by the PDE, teachers prepared for 4th-8th were required to take a different child development course than those prepared for PreK-4th grades. What will a 4th-8th teacher do for a kindergarten child who cries on the first day of school? (Carlson, et. al., 1999). In contrast to later adolescent development, how would PreK-4th teachers who only took the exam accommodate the differences of female and male seventh graders peer and self-identity adjustments through puberty? (Van der Graaff, Branje, De Wied, Hawk, Van Lier, & Meeus, 2014).

The teacher exam does not measure the subtle nuances of contemporary research on brain development. The research of Connor, Son, Hindman, & Morrison (2005) found that teachers who have completed more years of formal education and have received specialized training in early childhood education or child development provide more sensitive and appropriate practices for young children, especially with regards to self-regulation. Kindergarten teachers are prepared to support children’s social and emotional development and related regulation skills (Rimm-Kaufman, Early, Cox, Saluja, Pianta, Bradley, & Payne, 2002). Self-regulation is a necessary school-related executive function of the brain that children need to develop early to be successful throughout their school years so they can plan and monitor their progress toward goals, as well as adapt strategies.

Finally, the teacher exam will not prepare teachers for important but unique ways these teachers need to collaborate with families of PreK-4th and uniquely different with families of 4th-8th grade children (Stegelin, Wright, & Hartle,2007). In fact there are no PDE family collaboration competencies for the 4th-8th teacher preparation. Unless schools and teachers implement appropriate practices to build positive partnerships with families, research indicates those partnerships may decline across the grades and partnerships with less affluent families may be less frequent and less effective in supporting their children’s school success (Epstein, et.al., 2009).

In Sum, schools and superintendents may not find that the flexibility of hiring a teacher who is certified by exam-only a value-added to their school district (Hartle, 2008). The teacher certified by exam may not have the knowledge, skills, or dispositions to teach the critical content knowledge for the age group and perhaps miss a critical reading or math skill needed for later school success. The exam-only certified teacher may not be able to adjust to the social and emotional demands of the age group considering limited child development knowledge in areas, for example value of scaffolding the young child’s brain’s executive function of self-regulation. In contrast, an exam-only certified teacher may not fully grasp how adolescent behaviors in school and socially are impacted by hormonal body changes during puberty and may result in classroom management challenges. The long-term consequences will result in less highly qualified teachers, especially for children of high risk of school failure or drop out.

The PA Association of Early Childhood Teacher Educators does not support the “Certification by Adding On” option for either PreK-4th grade teachers, nor 4th-8th grade teachers and recommends rescinding this PDE decision. PA Association for Early Childhood Teacher Education university faculty members do, though want to support and partner with local education agencies to address staffing needs and shortages and work in partnerships to develop multiple paths to certification with rigor and accountability comparable to initial early childhood teacher preparation programs.

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